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ABSTRACT

Psychosexual development in young children is a topic that early childhood educators often ignore in the belief that children are not sexual beings. This paper discusses psychosexual development in young children, noting that preschoolers are often puzzled by sexual anatomical differences, that children need names for sexual body parts, and that occasional masturbation is normal. Other topics discussed in the paper include the Oedipal period in children, play choices of boys and girls, early cognitive stages in understanding about sex and gender, and the appearance of sex differences in play styles and preferences. Biological and cognitive development explanations for children's preferences for single-sex play groups are also given. Other sections of the paper discuss sex stereotyping in toy preferences, peer influences on sex stereotyping during early elementary grades, adults who over-emphasize sex differences, and television's role in emphasizing female-male differences. The paper concludes with tips for caregivers to promote healthy psychosexual development, including the following: (1) name body parts for young children; (2) talk about TV sexuality discrimination; (3) help boys and girls to become both competent/agentic and nurturant in their social interactions; (4) use bibliotherapy; (5) work on your own attitudes, fears, and shame about sexuality; (6) use creativity in planning and organizing activities that will minimize strong sex differentiation in play patterns; (7) provide a library of materials for parents so that they can learn more about psychosexual development; and (8) acknowledge the interest each child has in being a little boy or a little girl whose special gifts and unique self that can be respected in the classroom. (Contains 44 references.) (LPP)

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PSYCHOSEXUAL DEVELOPMENT IN INFANTS AND YOUNG CHILDREN: IMPLICATIONS FOR CAREGIVERS[1]

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Psychosexual development in young children is a topic that Early Childhood Educators often ignore in the belief that children are not sexual beings. Yet young children show behaviors that indicate awareness of sexual organs and pleasuring very early.

Four-year-old Rosie took the orange Koosh ball I had been tossing back and forth with her, and thrust it between her legs. Holding it there firmly, she announced to me: "I have a penis!" At first, not understanding her symbolic act, I replied mildly: "Rosie, you have a vagina. Boys have a penis." "No, not a vagina; I have a penis" she affirmed with a satisfyingly assured tone as she set the Koosh ball more securely between her legs over her dress and kept it there in place between her thighs. "Oh, the Koosh ball is like an orange penis for you. You are making it into an orange penis". Satisfied with my confirmation of her desire and my understanding of her symbolism, Rosie whispered confidentially to me: " Some boys have a vagina". "No way," I assured her. "Boys have a penis. Girls have a vagina." Rosie looked up at me uncertainly and replied "I was in a boy's bathroom once and saw a boy who had a vagina". I

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[1]. Presentation at the annual meetings of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, Toronto, November 19, 1998.

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explained to her that maybe the boy had such a little penis that she could not see it and thought he had a vagina. But only girls have a vagina." Then I explained to Rosie how lucky girls were to have a vagina, because after a girl grows up and gets married and has a baby, the vagina is the place a baby can come out when it is born.

Once Rosie had played out her sexual wish and had it fully acknowledged and accepted, then she no longer seemed interested in showing me that she could make herself a penis. (Brave girl! She did not depend on anyone else to get a penis for her!). Rosie went on then to chat with me about some boys who can pee sitting down. We both agreed that boys could do this but a boy would have to hold his penis way down so that no pee-pee would get on the floor. After I matter-of-factly talked about this with her, Rosie told me a dream she had. In the dream, two friends, both boys, went into the bathroom in her house near her bedroom and "peed all over the room!" I told her there sure would be a lot of cleaning up of pee-pee that the boys would have to do! She ignored my remark and said with great satisfaction that they would "get a licking on their backside." Rosie leaned forward, thrust her backside out, and then gestured with her hand to show me how and where the boys would get a spanking. In her view, boys have a penis and she does not. But a boy can get into trouble with a penis!

Other little girls do not get a sympathetic hearing for their longing to have a penis of their own. How would YOU have responded to Rosie's confidence that she could make herself a penis of her very own?

Preschoolers Are Often Puzzled by Sexual Anatomical Differences

Teachers need to be careful that they do not misinterpret as sexual prurience children's deep curiosity about each others' bodies.

> After the preschoolers had finished toileting and were milling about in the bathroom, Jonah came over to Mirra and slowly lifted up her dress. The teacher's eyes widened anxiously. She was afraid that a sexually charged episode was about to occur. But Jonah kept lifting Mirra's dress until he reached her belly button. With wonder, he gently put his finger in her belly button. She had one too! Just like his!

Childcare personnel need to help parents understand children's ideas about sexual organs and behaviors. Yet many childcare professionals themselves are puzzled by young children's naive conceptualizations and especially by little girls' longing for the power that a penis could presumably bring them. Another teacher telephoned me to say that parents had contacted her for advice. They were very upset about their little girl, Jennie.

> Grandma had called long distance to ask what Jennie wanted for Christmas. "Grandma, I would like a penis", Jennie answered promptly and enthusiastically. Grandma was horrified on the phone and scolded Jennie. "But Grandma", Jennie replied anxiously thinking this precious gift she had asked for might perhaps be too expensive: "It's all right. You could buy me a <u>little</u> one."

I reassured the teacher that such longings were very common among little girls. Boys have this visible and extensible organ that they can see easily and even waggle up and

down. Girls cannot even see where their urine comes from. Little boys can urinate standing up and even make different fountain designs with pee on the grass! Sometimes little girls are envious of this ability.

> Five-year-old Melody was grumpy. She complained that all the boys boasted that they could pee standing up. "I can so too" she declared to me. I'll show you!" We walked into the bathroom and she straddled the toilet. With great effort, Melody kept her legs far apart and managed to "pee like a boy". I agreed that she surely could do that. But probably she would find it more comfortable to sit down while she was urinating. Once I had accepted her indignation at boys' teasing about their greater powers, she readily agreed that sitting down while on the toilet was easier and more comfortable.

Some little boys exhibit much pride in their penis. In the Luxembourg gardens in Paris, a little fellow walking with his nanny was joyfully boasting that he could pee higher on every stone statue than any other little boy. With remarkable equanimity, the French nursemaid briefly let him show off his prowess.

Many infants and young children are not so lucky when they confide in adults. Their caregivers bring ancient fears and shame about sexuality into the children's lives very early. Some caregivers do not address a child's worry that little girls are "missing" a penis because they were "naughty" and it was cut off. Such dread and anxiety should be directly addressed. Give clear simple descriptions of the anatomical differences of boys and girls in a conversational and reassuring tone to help young children give up fears that one could lose a penis. Caregiver shame and confusion

about sexuality can send negative messages to young children.

The teacher watched carefully as her older toddlers settled in for naptime. "I make them put their hands outside the covers" she explained to me. "I don't want them touching themselves".

Yet good observation skills reveal how frequent and natural it is when babies are free of diapers during changing times, for them to caress a penis or finger their genitals. When adults are anxious and guilty about sexuality themselves they often create havoc with young children's ideas of reality.

One day in a childcare center where the parents had insisted on thick swinging doors to close off each toilet, five-year-old Louis came running. "Teacher, teacher, Leanne lost her wee-wee" he wailed in a panic.

Apparently, the swinging door had closed sufficiently slowly, so that Louis had glimpsed Leeanne sitting on the toilet seat with legs spread apart and no penis in view at all! Feeling embarrassed, the teacher called her Director over to handle this matter. The Director reassured the little fellow that all boys have a penis and girls do not have a penis. Girls have a uterus so that when they are all grown up and married and decide to have a child, the baby can grow in the uterus. And girls have a vagina, a canal through which a newborn baby will come out when it is born. Louis listened in awe and amazement. "Do you have a vagina too, Ms. Smith?" he inquired. She assured him she was built just like every other girl and woman, including his own mama. His next question was: "Can I see it, Ms. Smith?" The Director smiled gently and explained that sexual parts of the body are private parts and we do not show them off

to others. What Louis asked of his mom when he reached home from childcare that day we shall never know!

Children Need Names for Sexual Parts

Humans are sexual beings. Girls discover genital differences between 16 and 19 months of age (Galenson, 1993). Infants and toddlers find it soothing to rub a penis or stroke a vulva. During bath time, many little ones are curious about their genitals. Yet often a parent or caregiver who cheerfully sings out "I am washing your pretty arms; Now I wash your pretty toes", neglects to name genitalia that are washed. Thus, many children do not know names for sexual body parts. Indeed, caregivers use euphemisms of all sorts when referring to a penis - such as "Faucet", "Tinkle", or "Wee-wee." Adults even warn children "Do not touch yourself 'down there'", as if the genital region is so dangerous, one cannot even give it a name!

Occasional Masturbation is Normal

Many young children rub their genitals dreamily as a prelude to napping. One little girl patted her vulva rhythmically as her grandpa who was visiting from the Midwest read her a bedtime story. He was very shocked and upset. Mother had to explain to her preschooler that she could pat her vulva just fine after Grandpa had finished reading the story. He was uncomfortable; waiting till the lights were out to pat her vulva would make it easier for Grandpa to read to her at bedtime during his visit.

When teacher reads the group a story, some young children put their hands into their pants and peacefully pat their genitals, as if this good feeling helps them

concentrate better on the story that the adult is reading.

Masturbation that is compulsive and goes on all day is not normal. This can indicate great stress, an infection in the urethra or the genital region, or even that sexual abuse has occurred. Once in the Children's Center (Honig, 1977), a toddler entered the program after his mom had angrily left the father in another country and come back to live with her mother in Syracuse. The child was uncertain and bewildered at so many life changes. He sucked and pulled on his thumb with one hand and with his other hand he held on to his penis as if grasping for security during the day. This made it quite difficult for teachers to engage the boy in play with toys! And the child's anxious behavior continued for three months until he felt more secure with familiar loving caregivers and grew to become more and more interested in the play potential of toys in the toddler classroom.

The Oedipus Complex: What Is It?

Freudian theorists have conceptualized that between about 3 and 6-7 years of age, each child begins to want to "possess" and become closer to the parent of the opposite sex. If mama and papa are sitting on the couch snuggled together, a preschooler may well come and over and squirm into a place between the adults. A boy may push away his father who comes over to kiss and hug the mother.

> Lila, 3 1/2 years old, asked her father seriously one day: "Daddy, when I grow up and sleep in the big bed with you, where will poor mommy sleep?" Lila looked troubled. Then she brightened and exclaimed, "I know Daddy! She can sleep in my little bed!"

The father, a human development professional, told me he was nonplussed, even though in textbooks he certainly had read so much about Oedipal wishes and jealousies of preschool age children.

> Near the mirror in the dress-up corner of the center, Evie was twirling and admiring herself in the "wedding gown" she had put on. Mr. Joe came over and knelt down to her level. "Are you a bride?" he asked lovingly. " Yes and I'm going to get married!" proudly replied Evie." "Oh! And whom are you going to marry?", asked her young teacher. "My daddy, of course!" she answered happily as Mr. Joe in surprise fell backwards onto the floor.

Caregivers as well as parents need to know about the Oedipal period and the sometimes surprising expectations that preschoolers will have as they grow through this period toward emotional resolution of their desire to rival the same-sex parent. Soon enough, children who indeed do love the parent of the same sex, learn to want to grow up to be like the parent of the same sex, rather than a "competitor".

Play Choices of Boys and Girls Can Differ

Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson (1963) studied dramatic scenarios constructed by young children. Boys tended to make tall block configurations and then told stories full of bold actions. Girls created more peaceful, enclosed domestic scenes. "By the time they enter school, children have long been aware of their basic gender identities, have acquired many stereotypes about how the sexes differ, and have come to prefer gender-appropriate activities and same-sex playmates...During middle childhood...their behavior, especially if they are boys, becomes even more gender-typed" (Sigelman &

Shaffer, 1995, p. 307). Boys list preferences for cowboys and soldiers; girls list playing house and school (Sutton-Smith, Rosenberg, & Morgan, 1963). Summarizing decades of play research, Fagot (1988) noted sex differences in choice of play scenarios:

> Girls engage in more doll play and domestic rehearsal, more art activities, and dressing up. Boys play more with transportation toys, with blocks and with carpentry toys. Boys also engage in more aggressive activities and play more in larger peer groups. Girls spend more time talking and spend far more time with teachers than do boys. (p. 134)

Early Cognitive Stages in Understanding About Sex and Gender

Boys and girls are equally sophisticated in their **cognitive** understandings of gender identity. Toddlers are able to label themselves as a boy or a girl. Preschoolers are just beginning to understand that gender identity is stable and consistent across time (Honig, 1983). Not until the end of the preschool years do children realize that they cannot change their sexual identity simply by putting on clothes worn by children of the opposite sex or by doing behaviors of the opposite sex, such as pretending to be Batman. Many preschoolers struggle to understand that sex ascription is stable; they still believe that in the future they can carry out biological roles of the other sex (Honig, 1998).

> Roy was visiting with Grandma and playing with his cuddly toy monkey while mother was in the bedroom nursing the new baby. Roy lifted up his T shirt and pretended peacefully to nurse his own furry monkey. Grandma remarked

lovingly that his mama had nursed him too when he was a baby. She also explained that boys cannot grow up to make milk and nurse babies. Only girls can grow up to nurse a baby. "Oh yes I will too be able to nurse when I grow up!", Roy asserted indignantly.

Gender constancy does not develop until the later preschool years. By early school age, children across cultures understand that gender will not change just because a child wishes to be of a different sex or engages in cross-sex activities or wears cross-sex clothing. A study of preschool children's gender understanding in divorced vs. intact families in Taiwan revealed that in a culture that values males preferentially, older preschool boys in mother custody showed an increased awareness of gender constancy in comparison both with peers in intact families and with children in father custody (Honig & Su, 1995). Thus, the stresses of divorce seemed to hasten some children's understanding that a person's sex does not change, regardless of situation. Gender roles, of course, can change depending on culture and personal choice. Some children do show a strong wish for cross-dressing very early.

How Early Are Sex Differences in Play Partner Preference Found?

Sex differences in interactive play styles begin to appear from 10 to 14 months of age and are well established by the time children are 36 months old (Fagot, 1988). Over half a century ago, Parten (1933) observed that in 2/3 of the play groups, children chose and preferred same sex play partners. Almost a half-century later, Jacklin & Maccoby (1978) studied solitary and social play of pairs of 33-month-olds in a laboratory playroom. The toddlers were twice as sociable with same sex as with

opposite sex playmates.

Why do Children Prefer Single-sex Play Groups?

Biological Explanations

Boys show a higher level of activity and engage in more physically vigorous play than girls, whether indoors or outdoors (Hoyenga & Hoyenga, 1979; Rubin, Fein, & Vandenberg, 1983). Boys 3 to 11 years in six cultures engaged in more rough and tumble play than did girls (Whiting & Edwards, 1973). When they are a few months shy of three years old, boy peers are already more likely to play tug-of-war than girls or girl-boy pairs who are playing (Jacklin & Maccoby, 1978).

> Some young boys at play on my front lawn were engaged in fairly strong tussling and wrestling holds with each other. "Boys, if you need to fight, you will have to find a place at your own house", I called out. "We wasn't fighting. We was just wrestling!" explained one boy cheerfully as he disentangled from the pile of boy bodies thrashing vigorously around on the grass and stood up to explain boy play fighting.

Even humor expression differs by child sex. Young school-age boys are more likely to laugh vigorously and initiate behavioral and verbal humor than girls; boys are more likely to clown playfully and throw themselves on the floor (Honig, 1988).Indeed, many researchers hypothesize the very early tendency of young children from three years onward to play in same-sex groups may be particularly attributed to different gender **styles** in play and, possibly, gender differences in fearfulness. With more specific phobias and fears from school entry onwards, girls may not be as likely to opt

to role play a ranger chasing a villain or a daredevil hero saving someone in a log-jammed river from being crushed to death. Since boys show higher levels of active, rough-and-tumble play, toddler females may prefer to play with other girls, whose styles are less bumptious. Thus, the basic biological primate pattern, that males are both more active and more aggressive than females, may in part be responsible for early choices for sex-segregated play.

Cognitive Developmental Explanations

Cognitive ability level may explain part of the sex separations seen in play. A child's self-definition as a girl or boy is part of the growing ability and need to categorize persons in order to understand social relationships. Adults are big and children are small. Some children are boys; some are girls. These "essentially oppositional categories form part of children's social reasoning from their earliest encounters in the public domain of the ...nursery school" (Cook-Gumperz, 1991, p.213). Maccoby (1990) suggests that young children must even exaggerate gender roles in order to get them cognitively clear.

Sex Stereotyping in Toy Preference

Boys and girls play with different kinds of toys even prior to establishing clear identity as a male or female (Fagot & Leinbach, 1989). Toddlers start segregating themselves by toy preference, so that boys age 14 to 22 months prefer to play with trucks and cars, while girls prefer soft toys and dolls (Huston, 1985; Smith & Daglish, 1977). Preschoolers play more with same-sex than with cross-sex toys (Langlois & Downs, 1980).

Boys often prefer war toys while many girls prefer Barbie dolls (Goldstein, 1994). As children move into elementary school years, their preferences for toys (as expressed in letters written asking Santa Claus for toys) are even more gender stereotyped (Richardson & Simpson, 1982). Far more girls than boys asked for play items that were typed for the opposite sex. For example, almost a quarter of the girls asked for baby dolls and only .6% of boys. Yet about 15% of girls and one-quarter of the boys asked for sports equipment or spatial toys, such as construction sets. Thus, the **breadth** of toy preference differs for males and females. Girls are far more likely to play with masculine toys than boys with feminine toys. Boys also avoid feminine toys far more than girls avoid "boy" toys (Etaugh & Liss, 1992).

Peer Influences on Sex Stereotyping During Early Grade School

Younger children are quite tolerant of non-stereotyped play. When Damon (1977) asked 4 to 9 years olds about a little boy named George who insisted he wanted to play with dolls even though his parents told him that dolls are for girls, many of the youngest children believed that doll play and other cross-sex toy play was okay if that is what George wanted to do. When three and four-year-old boys and girls were left alone with toys, they were more likely to play with cross-sex toys.

However, peers are powerful influences. By age 6 responses become far more rigid and intolerant. Children view transgressions against conventional sex-appropriate behaviors and use of toys very seriously (Nucci & Nucci, 1982). Children entering school affirm stringent beliefs, such as: "Boys don't play with dolls. That's girls' stuff." , or "Girls shouldn't cuss!" Boys particularly respond quite negatively to boys

who choose cross-sex toys or who choose to play with or admit liking girls.

> "Daniel, I hate girls! Do you hate girls too?" inquired Christopher of his six year old peer who lived down the block and was visiting in Chris' yard. Anxious to please his friend, Daniel hesitantly answered "Yes. All except Natalie." "Who is Natalie?" asked the frowning Chris. "She's my new baby sister" whispered Daniel bravely.

Male peers impose a more stringent and possibly even menacing meaning at any hint of male peer appreciation or enjoyment of activities and toys perceived as "female" (Honig, 1998; Liss, 1981). Indeed, boys tend to ignore teachers or other girls, but their male peers give them "constant feedback on both appropriate play styles and appropriate playmates" (Fagot, 1988, p. 135). Thus, if males want to be accepted into the world of male peer play they seem driven to avoid "girl" toys or play. This massive, negative pressure to avoid perceived female activities and agents, in conjunction with evidence for increased infant/toddler male vulnerability to lack of maternal affection and warmth, may well account for later socialization difficulties that some males face (Honig, 1998). When they enter the school system, for example, boys may not have had the wealth of experience of girls in developing skills such as turn-taking, sharing, compromising, and adjusting to others' needs that girls are learning as they play out domestic themes in preschool.

Adults Often Over-Emphasize Sex Differences

Parental expectations from birth onward provide powerful incentives, both as direct reinforcers and models, for sharply divergent gender role behaviors (Archer,

1992; Block, 1983; Brooks-Gunn & Matthews, 1979; Honig, 1983; Schan, Khan, Diepold, & Cherry, 1980). Fathers particularly are more likely to punish play that is non-gender-stereotyped. Mothers actively reward cross-gender play. They join in and "interact with sons when playing with feminine-typed toys" (Golombok & Fivush, 1994, p. 116). Mothers are equally likely to engage in play with daughters regardless of which toy a girl chooses. Thus, fathers and mothers may be giving mixed and confusing messages about what is appropriate play. Fathers of boys tend to play more physical games with infant sons. Fathers provide sons with more vehicles, construction materials, toys such as laser guns and light sabers, balls, and sports equipment but with fewer dolls and domestic toys.

Girls are rewarded for learning interpersonal rules, so it is easier for them to stay in close contact with adults. Also, girls engage in different kinds of sociodramatic play compared with boys. Older sisters are "more likely to involve younger siblings in role play than are older brothers" (Ervin-Tripp, 1991, p. 87). Thus, the sexes diverge in developing interpersonal skills in contrast to dexterity in manipulation of objects in the physical world. Girls will tend to value and be more adept at the former; boys at the latter (Honig, 1998).

Caregivers sometimes anticipate that boys will be "naughtier" than girls. They respond significantly more to noncompliant male toddler responses, even though both sexes are mostly compliant with teacher requests (Wittmer & Honig, 1987).

Television Emphasizes Female-Male Differences

Television is a powerful force for children's learning about sexual life roles.

Women can be seen as doctors as well as nurses, as detectives and managers as well as secretaries. Yet TV research shows that quite rigid sex role stereotypes are often promoted on shows. TV commercials specifically target children's interest in conforming to social perceptions of gender identity in order to sell more toys or food (Van Hoorn, Noutot, Scales, & Alward, 1993). TV commercials during children's television programs have overwhelmingly more male characters than females. Males express more high excitement than females, and they dominate in the commercial voice-overs (Honig & Hake, undated).

Boys are more likely to enact fictional, TV superhero roles they have seen, such as He-Man, Ghost Busters, or Ninja Turtles. Girls prefer to portray family characters (Paley, 1986). Salient television superheroes in the '90's are the Power Rangers, who average more than 200 acts of violence per hour compared with 100 for the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. The Power Ranger show splices in footage of real-life actors and settings with special animation effects. This blurring of conceptually clear boundaries between real and film characters can heighten males' tendency to model the violent acts viewed. Preschool teachers report that the Power Rangers are powerful role models who "encourage more violent play, interfere with imaginative, cooperative play, and ...squelch creativity in play" (Levin & Carlsson-Paige, 1995, p.69).

Decades ago, Bandura, Ross & Ross (1963) demonstrated that male preschoolers are far more likely to imitate aggressive acts of a powerful adult model, particularly an adult male, than are female preschoolers. Thus, such television fare works toward widening differences between boys and girls so that males increasingly

act out violent, antisocial behaviors.

When four-year-olds were paired with a playmate of the same sex, the children mostly enacted the roles of mother and father (Matthews, 1981). Boys playing wife roles acted as if wives are inept and helpless. As fathers, boys enacted leadership roles and did little housekeeping participation. Girls, in contrast, played mother roles as nurturant, generous, and highly managerial. But they too portrayed wives as helpless and incompetent! The role of mother is viewed as positive in play. The role of wife is not. Teachers need to use their skills to widen the creative, imaginative scope of sociodramatic play to decrease sex role stereotyping (Smilansky & Shefatya, 1986).

How can teachers respect children's psychosexual development and learning of gender roles and yet promote more egalitarian respect for each sex?

TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS TO PROMOTE HEALTHY PSYCHOSEXUAL DEVELOPMENT

. Name body parts for young children, including penis, nipples, vulva, and testicles. Give children naming power, just as we do with all objects, toys, foods, and people in their environments.

. Talk about TV sexuality discrimination. If a TV program shows little girls as passive and boys as rescuers, talk about the plot and remind children of scenarios that are the other way round! Talk about the ways males and females act on different shows or cartoons and how realistic these portrayals may be. A 4-year-old may think rape on a TV film is OK. If a child watches such film fare, an adult needs to help the child understand the feelings of persons of either sex if violence occurs (Honig, 1983).

. Help boys and girls to become both competent/agentic AND nurturant in their social interactions. As teachers we need to re-examine our prejudices that only little girls can be tender and empathic and become ballet stars or only little boys can romp and bravely play the roles of cowboys or truck drivers.

. Act calmly if children come up with bizarre dreams or scenarios such as believing that boys have vaginas or girls have "lost a penis!".

. Give children the words to refuse to allow touching or exhibition of their sexual parts. One teacher coached a child so she could determinedly say to peers urging her yet again to take down her panties: "You've seen my 'gina enough and I've seen your penis enough!"

. Use bibliotherapy. Read books with young children that matter-of-factly teach about gender differences and how babies grow inside a mama's uterus and then get born as a boy or a girl (Gordon, 1983; Gordon & Gordon, 1977). Read books (such as the "Paper bag Princess") in which girls are heroines.

. Work on your own attitudes, fears, shames about sexuality. Learn to accept your body and its functions as a great gift, a natural gift, a gift that can be used for enjoyment and for being more fully human. Sexuality is a great mystery and can be a force for making the world a more loving and interesting place.

. Remember that what looks like a sexual curiosity in a young child may be more likely general curiosity about similarities and differences between children. Children are genuinely curious about each other and this does not imply that your preschoolers are obsessed with sex!

. Bring into the classroom for "Show and tell" adults who are active role models against gender stereotypes. Let a father describe his experiences with diapering and rocking the new baby to soothe colic. A mother can describe how she worked to fix a dripping faucet or used a soldering iron to create jewelry.

. Learn to recognize clear signs of possible sexual abuse. Inflammation of genital and anal areas, fearfulness of being touched, nervous furtiveness in sexual "showing" games, compulsive masturbation, or ability to describe/ act out adult sex acts clearly all are urgent signs to alert the caregiver to possible sexual abuse or premature exposure to adult sexuality.

. Use creativity in planning and organizing activities that will minimize strong sex differentiation in play patterns. Some children will indeed be more comfortable playing with same sex peers and with stereotypic toys. But taking down barriers between the housekeeping corner and the block area may make it easier for boys and girls to use construction materials as well as kitchen make-believe appliances in playing "house".

. Talk with the children about how we choose some toys and activities the same and some different. Accept child choices and also lure them into trying new roles and play themes.

. Provide a library of materials for parents so that they can learn more about psychosexual development (Child Study Association of America, 1970).

. In a deeply affirming way, acknowledge the wonder and the rightness of each child's being a little boy or a little girl whose special gifts and unique self you respect and enjoy in the classroom.

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